

Comments

January 11, 1999

Mr. Richard H. Martin
Superintendent
Death Valley National Park
Death Valley, CA 92328

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Dear Superintendent Martin:

The Death Valley Advisory Commission met on September 16th and 17th, and December 1st and 2nd, 1998 to discuss the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and General Management Plan (GMP) for Death Valley National Park. The purpose of the meetings were to examine the various issues in the DEIS and submit the Commission's views on the proposals and alternatives in the Plan during the open comment period.

The Commission's recommendations reflect a consensus of those members present. Nothing herein should be construed as limiting Commission members from making individual comments to the National Park Service on issues of specific concern to them or upon issues which the Commission did not discuss or take a position.

The Commission's comments are as follows.

There are three additions the Commission wishes to see incorporated into the Plan's background and supporting data. The additions deal with the legality of mining, formulation of a Concession Management Plan and water rights.

DVAC1

Planning Constraints and Mandates (page 46). The public needs to be aware that mining is an allowable activity in Death Valley. Therefore the following phrase should be added in this category: "Mining is a legally recognized activity in DVNP which is regulated by the Mining in the Parks Act and other appropriate laws and regulations."

DVAC2

Future Planning Efforts (page 51). Concession facilities and possible future development are an integral part of visitor accommodation in Death Valley. The Plan should provide for a Concessions Management Plan in the list of future planning efforts.

DVAC3

Appropriated Water Rights (page 267). The public should be made aware that Table B-4 is for information only and that it does not necessarily reflect all appropriated water rights, including those privately held, in the Park. A statement to this effect needs to be included with this Table.

DVAC4

The Commission has reviewed the three alternatives for each of the following categories in the DEIS and supports the Proposed Action alternative for each: Water Rights, Water

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DVAC1. A statement has been added to the plan recognizing that many mining claims exist in Death Valley as a result of the area being previously open to staking of claims. These claims, subject to determination of a valid right, are recognized and their existence may result in mining proposals by their owners. The plan recognizes that mineral development is an allowable activity under the Mining in the Parks Act, NPS management policies and regulations, and other laws and regulations.

DVAC2. Although no major future development is proposed, the potential acquisition of the Furnace Creek and Panamint Springs developments from willing sellers may create a situation where large scale commercial services are overseen by the Park Service. Existing concessions activity exists at Stovepipe Wells and Scotty's Castle. In addition, other commercial services may be desirable to provide visitor services. We agree that a plan should be prepared to encompass commercial activities in the Park, including concessions. A commercial services plan has been added to the list of future planning efforts.

DVAC3. The table has been clarified to indicate that the information contained in it does not reflect every water right that may exist in the Park. It is simply a list of those rights recorded with the state in Sacramento. Other valid rights may exist and the Park will be working in conjunction with the NPS Water Resources Division to try and accumulate records for all water rights.

DVAC4. Comment noted.

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	Use, Floodplains/Wetlands, Paleontological Resources, Geological Resources, Cave Resources, Sensitive Species, Fire Management, Inventory and Monitoring, Cultural Resources, Native American Interests, Mineral Development Activities, Information and Orientation, Visitor Facilities, Recreational Day Use Activities, Backcountry Cabins, Visitor Use Fees, Commercial Services, General Development Concepts, Roads and Circulation, Trails, Signs, Park Administration, Employee Housing, Solid Waste Disposal, Land Ownership and Use, Park Boundary, Wilderness, Land Acquisition, Abandoned Mines, Sand and Gravel for Road Maintenance, and Plan Implementation.	
DVAC5	On the following items, the Commission has qualified its support for the Proposed Action alternative for the reasons stated. Water Development. Livestock tanks and troughs are an integral part of a grazing allotment and should remain if utilization by livestock continues. The remainder of the Proposed Action for this category is supported by the Commission.	DVAC5. Page 63 of the 1998 draft plan addresses water developments for livestock grazing and clearly indicates that water necessary for animal health would be maintained.
DVAC6	Disturbed Land Restoration. The Plan should state that each site be individually evaluated and reclamation action be taken as appropriate to restore the area to as natural a condition as possible. There is confusion with the terms restore, reclaim and rehabilitate which appear to be used interchangeably throughout the Plan. Definitions for these terms would clarify some issues, such as contained in this category where "reclaimed" may be more appropriate than "restore" as used in the text of the DEIS.	DVAC6. A clarifying statement has been added indicating that a plan would be prepared for each site before actions are taken. The goals of the restoration strategy are addressed on page 66 of the 1998draft plan.
DVAC7	Introduced Species: The Proposed Action alternative for this category is strongly supported. The strategy to eliminate burros within the old monument boundaries needs to be extended to the lands added to Death Valley National Park by the California Desert Protection Act. The destruction caused by burros to native plant and animal life is well documented, therefore the goal should be no burros within the Park.	DVAC7. Comment noted.
DVAC8	Grazing/Range Management: The Plan needs to clearly state how livestock use, restrictions and grazing fees are to be established in the Plan to preclude drastic changes in livestock policies in future years due to NPS personnel changes. For this reason, the Commission recommends the following language be included in the Plan: "Grazing will be managed under existing allotment management plans and NPS Special Use Permit terms and conditions. Fees would be based on BLM schedules and NPS Special Use Permit costs. Restrictions on grazing use would be based on resource conditions, visitor safety and wilderness values. Use levels would be based, in the interim, on existing allotment plans, and if changed, would be based on scientific data, and in part but not entirely, on water, forage, protection of threatened and endangered species, riparian areas, water availability and soils."	DVAC8. The commission's recommended language has been added.
DVAC9	Interpretation: The Commission supports this category, but recommends adding an educational outreach program for surrounding communities. The educational opportunities that can be provided by the staff and facilities of Death Valley needs to be made available to schools in proximity to the Park.	DVAC9. We agree that community outreach is an extremely important aspect of the Park interpretive program. A paragraph has been added emphasizing the need for the Park to continually increase efforts to improve educational outreach in the surrounding communities.
		DVAC10. See response to comment SBBS3. The proposed action identifies Class I air quality designation as a desirable goal. This goal must recognize that redesignation of the Park to Class I is a state process. However, regardless of the success of this redesignation effort, the Park would work actively with the local air quality control boards to minimize effects whenever development threatens Park resources. The Park is also committed to continuing its air quality monitoring efforts, and improving them whenever funding permits and as stated in the plan, the Park would work with air pollution control officials to ensure compliance with Clean Air Act requirements.

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DVAC10

Air Quality: Many National Parks are designated as Class 1 areas under the Clean Air Act. Death Valley National Park should seek Class 1 attainment as well. This action will result in the Park staff taking an active role in mitigating potential air pollution sources such as Searles and Owens Dry Lakes and perhaps other sources beyond the boundaries of the Park. The staff needs to draw public attention to pollution sources and provide educational programs that examine the positive effects of clean air.

DVAC11

Visitor Use in Saline Valley: The level of detail for the Saline Valley alternatives is beyond what is required for a GMP. The specific issues of parking, camping, airstrips, hot tubs, vehicle access and sanitation need to be addressed in a site specific plan. The Commission recommends resource and cultural protection, environmental restoration, limits on public use and cooperative management with user groups be emphasized.

DVAC12

Developed Campgrounds. Accommodation for tent campers should not be neglected. It is recommended that the following phrase be added to the Plan; "Priority shall be placed on tent only camping sites at all campgrounds."

DVAC13

Backcountry and Roadside Camping. The prohibition on backcountry campfires needs to be reexamined, taking into consideration the desire of Park visitors to have campfires. However if fires are to be allowed, resource issues, such as fuel sources, ash removal and air pollution, need to be considered to protect wilderness values.

In conclusion the Death Valley Advisory Commission wishes to complement the Planning Team for its detailed and comprehensive work on the DEIS. The Team has compiled a large volume of facts and research in an orderly fashion, easily understood by the general public.

Sincerely,



Wayne Schulz
Chairman
Death Valley Advisory Commission

cc: Dennis Schramm

DVAC11. The list of suggested site plan details for Saline Valley visitor use in the draft plan has been removed and replaced with a list of issues, concerns, and resource protection goals to be addressed by the plan. Additional data collection regarding the local environment and visitor use needs to be completed before the plan is to proceed to that level of detail. The basic issues to be addressed include: public health and safety; protection of natural and cultural resources including sensitive species protection; exotic species; visitor use levels within existing number of spas; and the quality of the visitor experience for all visitors who come to this place. The plan will state that the long-term goal/vision for Saline is to be managed according to Park and NPS management objectives along with those developed by the site management plan.

Management goals were identified on page 76 of the 1998 draft plan. Additional wording has been added to further clarify management goals. The future site plan for the Saline Valley Warm Springs will place an emphasis on "natural, cultural resources protection, and environmental restoration." Wording in the final plan was changed to indicate that the management plan would be developed with input from all interested members of the public, not just user groups. The NEPA process will be used in this plan.

DVAC12. A statement has been added to the plan that the Park would work to identify issues and concerns with various camp users and find ways to accommodate a variety of campers, including tents, in developed campgrounds, while enhancing the visitor experience.

DVAC13. Comment noted.